

You Call, They Haul

Story and Photos by Heike Hasenauer

The sun rises over the Pacific Ocean as the Army logistics support vessel *CW3 Harold C. Clinger* sails toward the island of Hawaii.



For soldiers aboard Army logistics support vessels based in Hawaii, moving people and equipment among the islands is commonplace, but by no means humdrum.

THE Army logistics support vessel *CW3 Harold C. Clinger* rocked and rolled, rising and falling as its flat bottom smacked 10- to 12-foot waves off the coast of the “Big Island” of Hawaii — as the largest of the Hawaiian Islands is known.

For soldiers of the 605th Transportation Detachment stationed at Ford Island, on Oahu, sailing the sea

around the islands is commonplace, but by no means humdrum.

Most of them are awed every time they sail, said CW4 Jim Guest, who’s been sailing on Army vessels for 30 years.

This night’s voyage — to the port of Kawaihae — was typical, Guest said, scanning the seemingly endless ocean and acknowledging the star-studded sky that was dusted by the

shadowy white trail of the Milky Way and punctuated by a golden, crescent moon.

“It’s therapeutic, every time I do this,” said Guest, standing away from the vessel’s bridge rail, where the wind was so strong it could easily have knocked him off balance.



PFC Leisha Armijo secures *Clinger*'s gangplank as the ship's crew prepares to sail from Pearl Harbor on Oahu.



One of the soldiers on the 4-to-8-p.m. watch checked all the deck lights and scoured the sea a last time before the soldiers of the next watch came on duty. "I'm most concerned about little boats out there, with no lights on, which might not show up on our radar," said acting vessel master CW3 Don Berg, who's typically the ship's first mate.

Guest — the harbor master of the 605th's parent unit, the 545th Trans. Det., and a former commander of the *Clinger* — was on board the LSV to observe Berg's performance.

"Kawaihae is a tough port to get in

SPC Jaime Maldonado checks the LSV's position using maps and data supplied by the ship's Global Positioning System equipment.

and out of, due to wind direction and ocean conditions," said Guest. "It can be real tricky for anyone who hasn't sailed into that port a few times."

Before the start of the midnight watch, most of the crew, many of whom had been below deck playing chess and watching a Dallas-Houston football game, retired to their berths and staterooms. And the only sounds were the steady splash of waves against the hull, the creak of metal, and the occasional voices of the watch crew on the bridge.

As the sea grew rougher, pipes rattled, hangers in their metal lockers clanked with the rhythm of the ship's roll, and anything not resting firmly on the foam place mats that covered desks, tables and other of the ship's



Crewmembers prepare to raise the gangplank before *Clinger's* departure from Oahu. The voyage to Kawaihae, some 155 nautical miles away on the Big Island of Hawaii, takes roughly 16 hours.

The 272-foot Clinger and a newer LSV, the Charles Gross, regularly make the roughly 16-hour journey from their port at Pearl Harbor, on Oahu, to Kawaihae.



Members of the LSV's bridge crew carefully navigate the vessel through the often crowded confines of Pearl Harbor on the way to the open sea.

furnishings slid from side to side.

The 272-foot *Clinger* and a newer LSV, the *Charles Gross*, regularly make the roughly 16-hour journey from their port at Pearl Harbor, on Oahu, to Kawaihae, some 155 nautical miles away, primarily to support training exercises of the Oahu-based 25th Infantry Division.

The division regularly trains at Pohakuloa Training Area, a sprawling, austere landscape of jagged black lava rock on the Big Island. Because of the site's elevation, it's ideal for training aviation crews and their support units, a division spokesman said.

With 10,500 square feet of cargo area, *Clinger's* main deck "is our 'bread and butter,'" said third mate CW2 Tim Turner.

Collectively, the two boats average about 180 days deployed, mainly among the Hawaiian Islands, said CPT Brian Richie, who commands the headquarters element of the 545th Harbormaster Detachment. But the *Clinger*, which can haul up to 23 M1 tanks, has sailed as far as Korea, Johnson Island and Kwajalein Atoll.

Upon the ship's arrival at Kawaihae the next morning, the roughly 30-member crew of enlisted soldiers and warrant officers — among them three cooks, a communications

Bringing the mooring lines aboard and stowing them properly is one of the many tasks crewmembers perform before the ship gets underway.





The raising of the flag marks the beginning of another day at sea.

NCO and a medic — would upload Humvees, 5-ton trucks and containers belonging to the 25th Aviation Brigade.

The vessel and its crew would likely make two roundtrips to transport all the unit's equipment back to Pearl Harbor, Richie said. "Sometimes we make three or four consecutive roundtrips."

Before they left Pearl Harbor, the soldiers inspected every part of their ship to ensure equipment — including fire suits, adjustable shoring batons (to shore-up bulkheads) and fire-smothering foam — was where it should be.

Weather forecasts predicted 20- to 25-mile-per-hour winds, 8- to 10-foot waves and isolated showers. Nothing out of the ordinary. During the long hours at sea, the crew would undergo man-overboard, abandon-ship and fire drills some time in the middle of the night, "when they least expect them," Guest said. "It keeps us all on our toes, because, nine times out of ten, missions are pretty routine. If this job gets too exciting, something's wrong."

That's not to say the cruises to ferry equipment between the islands

During the long hours at sea, the crew would undergo man-overboard, abandon-ship and fire drills some time in the middle of the night.



are without excitement.

"Until this point, the islands of Molokai and Lanai have protected us from the winds," Guest said, as he outlined the ship's course. "As we pass through the Alenuihana Channel, between Maui and Hawaii, at 3 or 4 a.m., we can expect rougher seas, because there's nothing protecting us from the wind."

"It's a good life here," said SGT John Dunn, "compared to sweating in the field, out in the mud, fighting off mosquitoes."

Some of the ship's amenities include satellite TV and movie videos, plus some of the best menus anywhere.



Junior marine engineer SSG Tomaso Santomauro helps maintain the equipment that keeps the vessel running smoothly.

"This is the 'field' for us," said SPC James Stanton.

"This is as different from the infantry as night is from day," Stanton added. "For a cook, the greatest differences are being part of a smaller group of cooks, which prepares food for fewer people, and, of course, being susceptible to seasickness. In six months, six cooks have had to leave because they got sea sick."

"I wanted to be in the infantry and go to Ranger School," said PFC Leisha Armijo, causing some of the crew to

laugh — good naturedly — yet again. "My recruiter told me women can't do that. So, I told him, 'Just don't put me behind a desk.'"

Now she pulls watch with the other crew members, loads and unloads cargo, and performs the other jobs required of the deck crew, sometimes putting in 16-hour days.

Some of the ship's most serious business takes place in the engine room, where a team of two enlisted soldiers and an officer controls the vessel's main propulsion and electrical and sanitation systems, said third engineer CW2 Brian Duff, a former mechanical operator aboard a Navy Trident submarine.

Dunn also previously served in the



During the voyage to Kawaihae, *Clinger* sails past several of the other Hawaiian Islands, and typically runs into heavier seas in the channel between Maui and Hawaii.



"It's just awesome," Gross said. "There's no other job like this in the Army."

Navy, where he worked aboard an aircraft carrier. During a previous assignment with the 97th Trans. Company at Fort Eustis, Va., Dunn and his unit assisted the Coast Guard in its effort to fight the importation of drugs into the United States through the Caribbean.

"I sailed to Korea with this unit," said PFC Josh Gross. "It took us 21 days to get there, with no stops. Day after day at sea can get old. But then there are evenings when the moon is full and you see rainbows at night over the bow — the full spectrum of colors. It's just awesome. There's no other job like this in the Army." □



Clinger slowly moves in toward the offload point at Kawaihae (above), and once the ramp has been lowered, crewmembers supervise the discharge of her cargo (right).



